

Genesis Chapters 12-17 Torah Reading (Parshat Lech Lecha)

English version to be sung to the Torah tropes by Len Fellman

Latest version October 22, 2020

The call of Abraham

12:1 There spoke YHWH to Avram, “[Go you forth] from your land, from your kindred, and from the house of your father, to the land that I will show you.

2 [I will make you] a great nation [and I will bless] you. [I will make great] your name. [You will be] a blessing.

3 I will bless those [who bless you]. He who curses you, I will curse. Blessed through you [will be] all the families of the earth.”

4 [Thus departed] Avram, [just as] was told to him by YHWH. There went with him Lot.

[Now Avram] was age five years and seventy years when he went out from Charan.

5 [He took with him]—[Avram took] Sarai his wife, and Lot, [son of his brother], all their possessions [that they] had gained, and all the souls that they had made in Charan, [and they went out] to go forth to the land of Canaan.

And they came to the land of Canaan.

6 And traveled Avram [through the land], [as far as] the site of Shechem, coming to the Oak of Moreh. The Canaanite was then in the land.

7 And appeared YHWH to Avram, [who said to him], “[To your offspring] I give this land.”

And [he built there] an altar to YHWH who had appeared to him.

8 He went on from there [to the hill country] [to the east] of Beth El, and set up his tent,

[with Beth El] toward the sea and Ai toward the east. [He built there] an altar to YHWH, [and he called on] the name YHWH.

9 Then continued Avram, making his way toward the south.

Abraham in Egypt

10 There was a famine in the land. Then descended Avram to Egypt to sojourn there, since heavy was the famine in the land.

11 [And it happened], just when he was about to enter Egypt,

he said to Sarai his wife, “Well do I know [that indeed] a woman fair to look on you are.

12 [And it will be], [when they see] you—the Egyptians—[they will say], ‘His wife this is.’ They will kill me, while you they will let live.

12:13 So tell them, I beseech you, [that my *sister*] you are,
in order [that it goes well with me], [for your sake], [end aliyah] that I may live—my soul spared, [thanks to you].”

14 [And it happened], when Abraham came into Egypt, [they saw]—the Egyptians—his wife, that beautiful she was indeed.

15 And [when they saw her]—the courtiers of Pharaoh, they praised her, to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into the house of Pharaoh.

16 For Avram things went well [because of her]. [Given to him] [were sheep and cattle] and donkeys, servants and maids, she-asses and camels.

17 But afflicted [by YHWH] | [was Pharaoh himself] with plagues that were grievous, for his household, over the matter of Sarai, wife of Avram.

18 [So he called for him]: Pharaoh [sent for Avram], [and he said to him], “[What is this] [that you have done] to me?
[Why did you] not tell me that in fact your *wife*, she is?

19 [Why did you] [say to me]: ‘my sister is she’, [so that] [I would take her] for myself as a wife.
[And so now], here is your wife. Take her and go!

20 [So he issued orders] [concerning him]—Pharaoh [appointed some men],
[who escorted him off]—[both he himself], and his wife, and all that was his.

Abraham and Lot separate

13:1 [And so he went up]—Avram went up from Egypt—
[he himself made the trek], [along with his wife], [and all that was his], and Lot with him, to the Negev.

2 Now Avram was laden heavily [with livestock], with silver, and with gold.

3 He continued on his journeys [from the Negev] to Bethel,
[as far as the place] of which [there had been] his tent [the first time]: between Bethel and Ai,
4 to the site of the altar that he had built there before. [And he called out] [at that place]— [end aliyah] [Avram invoked] the name YHWH.

5 [And also with Lot]—who accompanied Avram—there were sheep and cattle and tents.

6 [The land did not suffice] [to sustain both of them]: [the land could not] [have them living] together,
[since indeed] their possessions were great, so they were not able to stay together.

7 [And there was strife] between the herdsmen [of the flocks of Avram] and the herdsmen of Lot.
[Now the Canaanite] and the Perizite were then dwelling in the land.

13:8 Then said Avram—[speaking to Lot], “I pray [that there be no] contention [between me] and you,
between my herdsmen [and your herdsmen]. Since men who are brothers, [we are indeed].
9 Is not [all the land] before you? Separate yourself, I pray, from me. [If you go to the left], [I will go right]. [If you go the right], [I will go left].
10 [Then he looked up]—[Lot lifted his eyes]—and he saw [the whole plain] of the Jordan: that it was well-watered,
([this was before] | the destruction [by YHWH] of Sodom and Gomorrah) [like the garden of YHWH], like *Eretz Mitzraim*, [all the way] to Tzoar.
11 He chose—[Lot took for himself]—[the entire] plain of the Jordan. Then headed Lot to the east, and [the two parted], each one from the other.
12 Now Avram dwelt [in the land of Canaan], [while as for Lot], he dwelled in the cities of the plain, [pitching his tent] near Sodom.
13 But the people of Sodom were wicked and sinful [before YHWH] exceedingly.
14 [Then YHWH] said [this to Avram], after Lot parted [from him], “Do [lift up] your eyes and see, [from the plain] [where you] are now standing,
to the north, to the south, to the east, and to the west.
15 [For indeed], [all of the land]—that which you see—to you [I will give it], [and to your seed] for all time.
16 I will make your seed like the dust of the earth.
[Think of it like this]: [if it were possible] [for a man] to count the dust of the earth, then so your seed could be counted.
17 [Rise up]—walk about [through the land], in its length [and in its breadth], since to you, [I am giving it].
18 And Avram [took up his tent], [and he came], [and he settled] by the terebrinths of Mamre, which are in Hebron,
[and he built there an altar to YHWH].

The campaign of the four great kings

14:1 [And it happened] in the days of Amraphel [king of Shinar], Ariqkh king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goyim:
2 [they all] [made war against] Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah,
[and also Shinay] | king of Admah, and Shemever king of Tzevoyim, and the king of Bela, (which is now Tzoar).
3 [All of these] [joined forces] in the Valley of Siddim, which is now the Sea of Salt (the Dead Sea).
4 A total of twelve years they had served Chedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they revolted.
5 [However in] the fourteenth year came Chedorlaomer and the kings [who were] [with him].
They struck the Rephaim in Ashteroth Karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, and the Emim in Shaveh Karyathaim,

14:6 and the Chorites [in their hill country] of Seir, [as far as] Eyl Paran, which borders the desert.

7[Then they turned back], [and they came] to Eyn Mishpat, which is now Kadesh. [They then struck] [the entire field] of the Amalekites as well as the Amorites, who lived in Chatzatzon Tamar.

8Then went forth the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Tzevöyim, and the king of Bela, [which is Tzoar], and [engaged them] in battle in the Valley of Siddim,

9 [against Chedorlaomer] king of Elam and Tidal king of Göyim, and Amraphel king of Shinar and Arioch king of Ellasar.

It was four kings [against the five].

10 Now the Valley of Siddim had pit after pit [filled with tar]. [When they all fled]—the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah,—[they fell into them]. [As for those who remained]: to the mountains they fled.

11[And the victors then seized] all the goods [that were in Sodom] [and in Gomorrah] [and all of their food], and went away.

12 [And they] [also took Lot] [and all his possessions]—the nephew of Avram,—and they left. (Lot had been living in Sodom.)

13 Then there came a fugitive [who told of it] to Avram the Hebrew, [who—as it happened]—

was encamped at the Terebinths of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshkol and brother of Aner. The latter were covenant partners of Avram.

14 When it was heard by Avram that taken captive was his brother,

he mustered his retainers—ones born [in his household]—numbering eighteen plus three hundred, and gave chase, up to Dan.

15 [He fanned out] [against all of them] [during the night]—he and his servants, and attacked.

[He pursued them] up to Chövah, which lies north of Damascus.

16 [And he brought back] all of the property, [and besides: also] Lot his brother and his possessions [he brought back],

and also the woman, and the people.

Melchizedek

17[And there came out] [the king of Sodom] [to greet him], after [he had come back] from defeating Chedorlaomer and the kings that [had been with him] in the Valley of Shavé, [now called] Valley of the Kings.

18 And Makhi-tzedek king of Sälem brought out bread and wine, for he was priest to *El Elyon* (God Most High).

19 [He blessed him] and said, “Blessed be Avram to God Most High, possessor* of heaven and earth.

20 And blessed be God Most High who delivered your foes into your hand.” [end aliyah] Avram then gave him a tithe of everything.

14:21 (Then said the king of Sodom) to Avram, “[Give to me] the people, and the possessions [take for yourself].”
 22 And replied Avram to the king of Sodom, “[I lift up] [my hand] to YHWH *El Elyon* (God most high), possessor of heaven and earth.”
 23 [If from a thread] to a sandal-strap [I should take] [from anything that is yours], ... so you [cannot say], ‘[It is I] who made Avram rich.’
 24 [Nothing for me], [except for] [that which were used up]*[by my servants]. *cf. Orlinsky, Notes on the New Translation of the Torah
 [As for the share] for the men—the ones who went with me: Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre—[let them] take their share.”

The divine promises and Covenant

15:1 [Now it happened after] [the things] [we just heard about]: there came [the word of YHWH] to Avram in a vision, saying,
 ”[Fear not], Avram. I am a shield for you. Your reward will be very great.”
 2 And [replied Avram], “My Lord YHWH/*Elohim*, [what will you give me], [seeing as I] [will go off] [without child],
 and the heir [to my household] will be Damascus Eliezer.”
 3 Then continued Avram, “Look at me! You have not given me seed. And now a member of my household will inherit what is mine.”
 4 Suddenly [the word of YHWH] [came to him], saying, “[That one will not inherit] from you,
 but rather one who comes [from your loins]—it is he [who will be your heir].”
 5 God then took him outside, and He said, “[Gaze now] [toward the heavens] and count the stars, [if you are able] to count [all of them],”
 and God [said to him], “So shall be your seed.”
 6 [And he trusted] in YHWH, [end aliyah] and God credited it to him as righteousness.
 7 [And God said] to him, “[I am YHWH], the One [who took you out] from Ur Casdim (Ur of the Chaldees),
 [in order to give] [over to you] [the land that you see here] [as an inheritance].”
 8 [And Avram replied], “My Lord [YHWH/*Elohim*], how can I really know that I will inherit it?”
 9 [To which] [God said to him], “Bring to me a heifer of three, a goat of three, and a ram of three, [a turtle dove], [and a young pigeon].
 10 [He brought to Him] [all of these], [and he split them] in two [down the middle],
 and laid each half opposite the other. [But the birds] he did not split.
 11 There descended some vultures on the carcasses, which were driven off by Avram.
 12 And as the sun was setting, [a deep slumber] fell on Avram, and behold! [a feeling of dread] and darkness quite deep fell upon him.

15:13 [And God said] [to Avram], “You must know for certain [that strangers indeed] | will be [your progeny] in a land [that is not theirs]. [Men will enslave them] and [oppress them] for a full four hundred years.
 14 [But know in fact] [that that nation] [who enslaves them] will be judged by Me. After that, they will go out, with wealth in abundance.
 15 [And as for you], you will go to your fathers, in peace. [You will be buried] at a ripe old age.
 16 The fourth generation [will return] here, [for not until then] [will the sin run its course]—the iniquity of the Amorites—[not till then].
 17 [And just as] the sun had set, [thick darkness] appeared.
 And behold, an oven that was smoking and a torch that was flaming were seen to pass between the halves of the animals.
 18 On [that very day] [a new pact was cut] [by YHWH] [with Avram]—a covenant—[and God said],
 “[Unto your seed] I am giving the land [you see here], [from the River] of Egypt to the great river, [the River Euphrates],
 19 [the lands of the Kenites] and of the Kenizites, and of the Kadmonites,
 20 of the Hittites and the Perizites, and the Raphaim,
 21 of the Amorites and the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Yebusites.”

The birth of Ishmael

16:1 Sarai—wife of Avram—had not given birth by him. [And she had] a slave-girl—an Egyptian, and her name was Hagar.
 2 And said Sarai to Avram, “[Hear me now]: [I’ve been kept] by YHWH [from having children].
 [Come now]—[consort with my slave]. Perhaps I will get children through her.” And Abraham listened to the voice of Sarai.
 3 [And she took]—Sarai, [wife of Avram]—Hagar the Egyptian, [her slave-girl] at the end of ten years of him dwelling—Avram—
 in the land of Canaan, and [she offered her] to Avram her husband, to him as a wife.
 4 He came into Hagar, and she conceived. [When she saw] that she was pregnant, of light worth was her mistress, in Hagar’s eyes.
 5 Then said Sarai [to Avram], “[The wrong done me] is on you! [For it was I] who placed my maidservant [into your arms].
 [When she saw] that she was now pregnant, [of light worth am I] in her eyes. So may judge YHWH, between me and you.”
 6 Then said Avram to Sarai, “Behold! Your slave [is in your hands]. Do with her, [as it seems good] in your eyes.”
 [So being afflicted] by Sarai, Hagar fled [from before her].
 7 [Hagar was then found] [by a messenger] [of YHWH] by a spring of water in the desert, at the spring on the road to Shur.

16:8 [The angel said this]: “Hagar, handmaid [of Sarai], from whence have you come, and where will you go?”
 [And Hagar said], “from Sarai my mistress I am running away.”
 9 And said to her, the angel of YHWH: “[Go back] to your mistress, [and suffer the degradation] under her hands.”
 10 [And said] [to her], the angel of YHWH: “I will increase greatly your seed, so that they cannot be counted for multitude.”
 11 And said to her, the angel of YHWH: “Behold, you are pregnant, [and will give birth] to a son.
 [You will call] his name Ishmael (“God hears”), since YHWH has hearkened to your affliction.
 12 He will be a wild-ass of a man: his hand [against everyone], and the hand of everyone [against him].
 In the face of all his brothers, [he will take up his dwelling].”
 13 She gave [a name to YHWH] [who had spoken] to her: “[You are] The God Who Sees!”
 Because, [she explained], “[Is it not true], [what happened here]: [I have gone on seeing], after The One saw me?”
 14 [This is why] they called the well: “Well of the One Who Lives, [and Sees Me]”. It is found between Kadesh and Bered.
 15 [And she gave birth]—[Hagar then bore] to Avram a son. And called Avram [the name of his son], whom Hagar had borne him: *Ishmael*.
 16 [And Avram] was age eighty years, [and six] years, when Hagar bore Ishmael to Avram.

The Covenant and circumcision

17:1 Now Avram was age ninety years, and [nine years], when there appeared YHWH to Avram
 and said to him, “I am *El Shaddai*. Walk in my presence and be blameless.
 2 I set my covenant [between Me] and you. I will increase you in great measure.”
 3 Then fell Avram on his face, [whence there] [spoke to him] *Elohim*, as follows:
 4 “[As for Me], here now is My covenant with you: [so that you will be] the father of a host of nations.
 5 [You will not be called] [from this time forth], by your name Avram.
 Rather will your name be Abraham, [because indeed], father of a host of nations, [will I make you].
 6 [I will cause you] [to bear fruit] quite abundantly, [and I will make you] into nations. [end aliyah] Kings from you will come forth.

17:7 “I will maintain my covenant between [me and you], and [among your descendants]
[who come after you], [throughout their generations]; a covenant for the ages. I will be to you a God, [and to your descendants] [after you].
8 I will [bestow upon you] and to your descendants after you [this land], the land [of your sojourns],
[the entire] land of Canaan, as a possession for the ages, and I will be for them, their God.”
9 Then said God to Abraham, “[As for you]: my covenant [you must keep];
[This applies both to you], and to your descendants after you, [throughout the generations].
10 This [is my covenant], the one [that you must keep]—it is between Me and you,
and with your descendants, [that come after you]: There must be circumcised among you [every male].
11 [You shall be circumcised] in the flesh of your foreskin. [It will be] a sign of the covenant [between Me] and you.
12 At [age eight days] [shall be circumcised] [among yourselves] [every male], [throughout your generations]:
those born in your house, [and those bought with money] from any foreigner [of whom it is known] that not of your seed is he.
13 Circumcised, [indeed circumcised] shall be one born in your house and one purchased with money.
[This is to be] [My covenant indeed] in your flesh, a *brit olam* (a covenant for the ages).
14 The uncircumcised— [any male] [who does not] circumcise the flesh of his foreskin—
[there will be cut off] the soul of that person from his people: My covenant he has broken.”
15 Then said *Elohim* to Abraham, “Sarai, your wife—do not call her by her name, “Sarai”, for Sarah is her name.
16 I will bless her, and also [I will bestow]—[to be borne by her]—[to you] a son,
[I will bless her] [so that she’ll become] nations. Kings of peoples from her will rise!”
17 [Then there fell] Abraham [on his face] and laughed. He said [to himself in his heart],
”[To a hundred-year-old] man [shall there be born a child]? [And will Sarah], who is age ninety years, give birth?”
18 And said Abraham to God, “If only Ishmael, might live in your presence.”
19 And replied God, “And yet, Sarah—[indeed, your wife]—will bear for you a son, and you will call his name Isaac.
I will establish my covenant [with him in truth] as a *brit olam*, for his seed after him.

17:20 [And as for Ishmael], [I have heard you]: [This I will do]:, [I [will bless him], [and fruitful I] [will cause him to be].
 I will increase him, in great measure. Twelve [tribal leaders] [he will father], [and I will make him] a great nation.
 21 But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, [the one who] [will be borne for you] by Sarah at the appointed time, [another year] hence.”
 22 [When he had finished] speaking to him, God ascended—[*Elohim* went up], from beside] Abraham.
 23 Then took Abraham Ishmael [his first-born son]
 [and all those] born in his house and all [those bought] [with his money], [every male] [from among the people], of the household of Abraham,
 [and he circumcised] the flesh [of their foreskins], [on that] [very day] [the day upon which] there spoke to him, *Elohim*.
 24 [And Abraham] was nine and ninety years old [when he was circumcised] in the flesh of his foreskin,
 25 and Ishmael his son was three and ten years old [when he was circumcised] in the flesh of his foreskin.
 26 On that very day were circumcised Abraham and Ishmael his son,
 27 [And all the people] of his household—those born in the house and those purchased with money from a stranger—
 [end aliyah] they [were circumcised with him].

Len Fellman's English readings with tropes

The purpose of this project is to translate *THE SONG OF THE TORAH* into English.

I work by comparing as many as ten English translations of a *pasuk* and creating a cantillated English sentence that sounds as much as possible like the Hebrew. They follow the Hebrew as closely as possible, word for word and trope by trope. The English language has an amazing flexibility, making it possible to make the English word order match that of the Hebrew quite well, allowing for some “poetic licence”, and some willingness on the part of the listener to be “carried” by the melody more than by the English syntax. The translation needs to sound good when *chanted*, but not necessarily when *spoken or read*.

Unlike most translations, these “transtropilations” are not intended to be a substitute for the Hebrew. On the contrary, they are meant to provide a “window” into the Hebrew text and its musical expression. My ideal listener knows enough Hebrew and has enough interest to follow the Hebrew in a bilingual text while the *leyner* is chanting the English version, to bring the Hebrew text to life, both *verbally* and *musically*. For this purpose I use *exactly* the same tropes in the English as in the Hebrew (almost always on the corresponding English word).

The texts can be used to do **consecutive translation**, i.e. leyning a phrase in Hebrew, followed by the corresponding phrase sung in English. Some of my recordings demonstrate this. I do this frequently when leyning for groups that either know little Hebrew, or that don't have a *chumash* in front of them.

I favor literal translations (e.g. “cut a covenant”) to call attention to Hebrew idioms, and towards simpler (even if less accurate) words (e.g. Ex. 12:7 “beam above the door” rather than “lintel”) to be easier to follow. If my readings provoke a discussion of the Hebrew, I consider that as justification for using less-than-idiomatic English. I try to find just the right balance between “literalness” and “listenable-ness”. A primary goal is throwing light on the Hebrew syntax.

In order to adapt the trope symbols to a left-to-right language like English, I *reversed* the direction of the trope symbols:

mercha tipcha munach tevir mapakh *or* yetiv kadma *or* pashta geresh gershayim telisha katana telisha gedola

(Generally speaking the *conjunctive tropes* such as mercha, munach, mapakh, kadma, and telisha katana “lean toward” the words they “conjoin” to, while the *disjunctive tropes* such as tipcha, geresh, gershayim, and telisha gedola “lean away” from the words that follow, so as to create a sense of separation.)

The trope symbol is normally placed under the accented syllable, unless it is a *pre-positive* accent (telisha gedola, placed *at the beginning* of the word or phrase) or a *post-positive* one (telisha katana or pashta, placed at the *end* of the word or phrase).

The Hebrew text frequently puts a *makkeph* (which is like a hyphen) between words in order to treat them as a single word to be chanted. I use a different system for English: If an entire English phrase is to be chanted to a single trope melody, I place it between grey brackets, as in this phrase from the Book of Lamentations:

[clings to her skirts]

The *leyner* is invited to fit this phrase to the *Eicha* “rivi'i” melody in whatever way seems most natural.

As a variant of the “grey bracket” device, I indicate pairs of tropes by “wrapping them around” the phrase which have the combined melody:

| | | |
|------------------|--|--------------------------|
| mercha/tipcha | kadma/geresh (<i>or</i> : azla, etc.) | mercha siluk |
| (Renew our days) | (She weeps bitterly). | (a fire-offering to God) |

Again, the *leyner* should decide on the most natural way to fit the phrase to the combined trope melody.

I put words in gray which I consider essential but which don’t strictly match the Hebrew. I also “pad” some phrases with extra words in gray to fill out a musical phrase nicely. Different trope systems vary widely in the length of the musical phrase used, so the words in gray may or not be used depending on the *leyner*’s cantillation system. In particular, the tropes *telisha g’dola* (ר), *legarmeh*, *metigah-zakef*, and *pazer* vary widely in the musical phrases used for chanting. (And please indulge me in my whimsical treatments of *shalshelet*.)

“*Metigah-zakef*” is a special trope combination which can be recognized by a kadma and a zakef katon appearing on the same Hebrew word (again, a *makkeph* makes two words into one). (There are several examples in Genesis 18 & 19, beginning with 18:16). I indicate this by placing the corresponding English phrase in grey brackets:

[Take heed—take care for yourself]

In some trope systems (viz. cantor Moshe Haschel in “Navigating the Bible II”) this is given a distinctive melody—I add extra syllables to fill out the musical phrase (as in “take care” in this example). Haschel’s system also chants the trope *munach* as *legarmeh* more often than other systems do.

I don’t write a single word of translation without first hearing the melody of the phrase in my mind, following one of two trope systems: The one by Portnoy and Wolff (*The Art of Cantillation*) or the one by Joshua R. Jacobson (*Chanting the Hebrew Bible*).

I transcribe the name יהוה as YHWH (in small caps). I almost always chant this as *yud-hey-vav-hey*, which I have discovered fits marvelously into several of the trope melodies. But of course the *leyner* can choose to pronounce it as “*God*” or “*Adonai*”.

Warning on the Hebrew text: The text I use for the English trope system is from Aryeh Kaplan; the Hebrew text I display is from Wikisource. Occasionally (but rarely) a phrase will use different tropes in the two systems.

The English translations I mostly use (besides several scholarly commentaries) are the following:

Aryeh Kaplan, ‘The Living Torah’ (1981) (also my source for proper names & transliterations)
Richard Elliott Friedman, ‘The Bible With Sources Revealed’ (2003)
Everett Fox, ‘The Five Books of Moses’ (1997)
The Stone Edition ‘Tanach’ (1996)
JPS ‘Hebrew-English Tanach’, (2nd Ed. 2000), *along with* Orlinsky, ‘Notes on the New Translation of the Torah’ (1969)
Robert Alter, ‘The Five Books of Moses’ (2004)
Commentaries in the ‘Anchor Bible’ series
Rotherham, The Emphasized Bible (1902)
The Jerusalem Bible (1966) (also my source for topic headings)
The New King James Bible (1982)